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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY/IRAQ: CONTROVERSIAL SUNNI CONFERENCE
PROCEEDS IN ISTANBUL; IRAQI EMBASSY PROTESTS

REF: ANKARA 6372

Classified By: POL/C Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The Turkish press reported Dec. 15 that a controversial Sunni Arab conference on Iraq -- that had been postponed at the GOT's request so as not to conflict with Iraqi PM Maliki's Nov. 15-16 visit to Ankara -- was held in Istanbul Dec. 13-15. According to press, the gathering (see reftel) was "backed by Qatar," and participants included "some radical Sunni groups." One participant was apparently Hareth al-Dari, head of Iraq's Association of Muslim Scholars. We understand al-Dari is the subject of an Iraqi arrest warrant.

¶2. (C) We followed up briefly with the GOT's Deputy Special Envoy for Iraq, Fazli Corman. He confirmed that this was the same conference the GOI had objected to one month previously. He emphasized that the GOT was powerless to stop the conference from proceeding, and that Turkey had provided no assistance or support. Corman reported that the Iraqi Embassy here had called on the MFA Dec. 14 to protest the meeting, and that the Iraqi Kurds were apparently also angry.

¶3. (C) Corman also told us that his superior, GOT Special Envoy Celikkol, was in Istanbul Dec. 15 to hold private meetings with some participants. He underscored that Celikkol was only doing so to gather more information on the conference (since no GOT representatives attended) and to persuade Sunni Arabs to participate peacefully in Iraqi politics. We plan to follow up with Celikkol himself in the coming days and will report septel.

¶4. (U) The Turkish MFA released a statement Dec. 15 noting that the conference took place. MFA emphasized that Turkey is a free country, that many civil society groups hold meetings there as a matter of course, and that it hoped that the conference would contribute to an atmosphere that would end the daily bloodshed in Iraq. The statement reaffirmed Turkey's support for the Maliki government and for a democratic, stable Iraq.

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